

READING POLICY RESEARCH

1. Key Findings from *Getting Farther Ahead by Staying Behind – Manhattan Institute* (http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_49.htm):

- After two years of the policy's implementation, Florida third graders who were retained made significant reading gains relative to their socially promoted peers.
- These academic benefits grew substantially from the first to the second year after retention.
- Students lacking basic reading skills who are socially promoted fall farther behind over time, whereas retained students appear to be able to catch up on the reading skills they need to be successful.

2. Key Findings from *REVISITING GRADE RETENTION: AN EVALUATION OF FLORIDA'S TEST-BASED PROMOTION POLICY*:

- This study is an evaluation of Florida's Third Grade retention policy, and the policies impact on student reading performance in the first two years after students were retained.
- The study uses individual student data.
- The findings suggest that retained students slightly outperformed socially promoted students in reading the first year after the retention.
- These gains increased significantly in the second year.

3. Key Findings from *The Benefits of Florida's Test-Based Promotion System (Civic Report No. 68)*:

This paper studies the impact of Florida's policy to end the social promotion of struggling third grade readers. By studying the long term performance of children who just barely passed the test, and therefore promoted, as well as those who were just barely left behind, and therefore received intensive reading interventions, the researchers found that:

- On average, the students who received targeted intervention performed better academically, in both the short and long term, than those who were promoted.
- The benefits of the remediation were still apparent and substantial through the seventh grade (which is as far as the data can be tracked at this point).

4. Summary of the RAND Report titled *Ending Social Promotion in New York City Public Schools Without Leaving Children Behind*:

Retained Students Did Not Report Negative Socio-emotional Effects

The student surveys showed that retention did not have negative effects on students' sense of school belonging or confidence in mathematics and reading; retained students reported comparable or higher levels than those of their at-risk promoted peers. In addition, retained students reported a greater sense of school connectedness than at-risk promoted students and not-at-risk students, even three years after the retention decision. The mean differences were small but statistically significant. These results mirror what other studies have found.

Near-Term Benefits Hold Promise for the Possibility of Longer-Term Benefits

The study found positive near-term benefits of NYC's promotion policy. Students affected by the 5th grade promotion policy performed better than they would have in absence of the policy in the 5th grade and into 7th grade. In addition, the study found no negative effects of retention on students.





Comprehensive K-3 Reading Policy - Myths Vs Facts

MYTH: Retention doesn't work.

FACT: Retention for retention's sake doesn't work. A lot of old research proves that. But when you pair retention with intervention measures and make retention a last resort, the learning gains are undeniable. Florida's Comprehensive K-3 Reading Policy starts with a strong focus on preventing student reading difficulties. The policy is intensive reading intervention in grades K-3, retention as a last resort, and more intensive intervention in the event of retention. More current research specifically conducted on Florida's K-3 Reading Policy proves that Florida's approach to retention works. Research by Jay Greene and Marcus Winters showed that retained students in Florida made significant progress compared to students that just met the cut score for promotion, and retained students continued to outperform those who were promoted in reading and math through 7th grade. In addition, the greatest gains seen were for minority students (The Benefits of Florida's Test-Based Promotion System, Civic Report No. 68). Additional studies on Florida's policy are being conducted to determine the impact of retention through 12th grade, on graduation rates and participation in Advanced Placement, among other things.

MYTH: There is no evidence that retention works.

FACT: That couldn't be further from the truth for Florida students. Over the course of a decade, the percentage of Florida students with significant reading deficiencies was nearly cut in half. In addition, as all students learned to read, the number of K-3 students referred to special education cut in half. There's also been research conducted specifically on Florida's K-3 Reading Policy by Marcus Winters and Jay Greene, and it showed that retained students made significant progress compared to those students that just met the cut score for promotion, and retained students continued to outperform those promoted students in reading and math through 7th grade; and the greatest gains seen were for minority students (The Benefits of Florida's Test-Based Promotion System, Civic Report No. 68).

Indiana also adopted a K-3 Reading Policy. Over the course of only two years, Indiana increased the percent of 3rd grade students reading proficiently on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) by 5 percentage points, going from 33 percent to 38 percent proficient.

MYTH: Florida's 3rd grade retention policy simply retains kids who can't read on grade level by the end of third grade.

FACT: Florida took a comprehensive approach to help ensure all students read on grade level by the end of third grade. Retention for retention's sake doesn't work. Florida's K-3 Reading Policy identifies students struggling with literacy skills as early as the first 30 days of Kindergarten. Parents of K-3 students identified with a reading difficulty are notified immediately and intensive reading interventions are provided based on student needs. These students are monitored frequently and instruction is adjusted regularly to meet their reading needs with the goal of reaching grade level reading proficiency. Retention at the end of third grade is an absolute last option, and retention comes with a completely different course of action. Retention can provide struggling readers the additional time they need with more intensive interventions to catch them up with their peers. Retention has been tried in other states before as a policy to address illiteracy and failed, as have efforts to fund literacy efforts without test-based assurance of its effectiveness. It was the unique combination of effective interventions coupled with retention that define Florida's policy and ensured its success.

MYTH: A K-3 policy is a huge financial undertaking.

FACT: The key to the financial viability of this policy is making better use of existing local, state and federal funds. With a national average level of spending of \$10,000 per child per year, a typical American student has had \$40,000 invested by taxpayers by the time they reach the end of the 3rd grade. Taxpayers provide that money to educate rather than merely babysit the child. Moreover, high school dropouts are financially straining on society. Annie E Casey Foundation cites:

- "Every student who does not graduate from high school costs society an estimated \$260,000 in lost earnings, taxes and productivity."
- "High school dropouts also are more likely than those who do graduate to be arrested or have a child while still a teenager, both of which incur additional financial and social costs."

The primary grades are the least expensive options to remediate students and the most realistic time to make it happen. Any cost incurred with a Comprehensive K-3 Reading policy should be regarded as an investment in child literacy. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

MYTH: Retention damages a child's self-esteem.

FACT: The RAND Corporation studied the effects of retention on students and found that retention did not have negative effects on students' sense of school belonging or confidence in mathematics and reading. In addition, retained students reported a greater sense of school connectedness than at-risk promoted students and not-at-risk students, even three years after the retention decision. These results mirror what other studies have found.

MYTH: One test on one day determines whether a student is promoted or retained in 3rd grade.

FACT: A Comprehensive K-3 Reading Policy isn't aimed at retaining students, and the retention decision is not based on one test given on one day. The policy is aimed at providing the necessary reading instruction and intervention K-3 to ensure kids are reading on grade level by the end of third grade. At the end of third grade students are given multiple options to demonstrate sufficient reading skills for promotion to 4th grade, including the statewide assessment, an alternative standardized assessment, and a test-based student reading portfolio.

MYTH: When kids are retained, they are sent back through 3rd grade hoping they “get it” the second time around.

FACT: Third grade students retained are given the instructional time they need with more intensive reading interventions to help ensure they master the reading skills necessary to prepare them for the more rigorous 4th grade coursework to come. Retention comes with more intensive interventions with a highly effective teacher. Such interventions could include, but are not limited to: summer reading camps; more dedicated time for reading instruction and intervention; supplemental tutoring before, during or after school; a reading mentor; and/or a parent home reading plan.

MYTH: Florida spent a lot of money on professional development (e.g. reading coaches).

FACT: Providing supports (teacher professional development, reading coaches, etc.) for implementation of the policy is important. But that doesn't necessarily mean “new money” is required. The key to the financial viability of this policy is making better use of existing local, state and federal funds. In Florida, existing funds were first repurposed to provide professional development for teachers and principals. For example, there was \$36 million in existing state professional development funds; with the stroke of a pen (proviso language) districts were required to prioritize half these funds to reading professional development. Also, there was \$2 million of existing federal discretionary funding that was used to provide an online reading professional development course for teachers and principals. The amount of new money for the first year of implementation was roughly \$3 million to place K-5 reading coaches in low performing schools.

MYTH: You can't pursue a K-3 Reading Policy without a solid PreK program.

FACT: The initial gains Florida saw in early grade reading was a result of Florida's K-3 Reading Policy. Florida's K-3 Reading Policy was first enacted in 2002-2003, which was 3 years before Universal Prekindergarten was implemented statewide. In those 3 years, Florida's 3rd graders' reading achievement improved. In 2001-2002, 27% of third grade students scored at the lowest achievement level on Florida's statewide reading test. By 2004-2005, only 20% scored at this level; a 7% decrease. The results speak for themselves; a state can start achieving results in early grades without a PreK program.